

**Testimony  
Appropriations Committee  
9 December**

**Paul Boticello, Executive Director, AIDS Project Hartford**

The Governor has attempted to cut or eliminate the Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP) from Connecticut several times over the past year. So far the legislature has managed to resist these cuts and I hope you will do so again. The savings to the state if the programs were entirely eliminated would be approximately \$500,000, so the cut will not have a major impact on any final decision that is worked out to address the budget shortfalls. The SEPs also are funded entirely with state dollars – there is no federal component of the programs, so state cuts, even small ones, are felt disproportionately in the SEPs.

I will speak only for the Hartford SEP, because that's the program we operate at AIDS Project Hartford, but much of what I say will apply to other SEPs as well. The total budget for the Hartford program is \$180,000 annually and we staff a mobile van that serves the Hartford area five days a week, eight hours a day and when the funding allows we also operate two nights and on Saturdays. Our program pays for itself each year if we are able to keep one person from contracting HIV each year.

Given the medical costs of supporting a person living with HIV, the SEPs are cost effective and good public health as well. The SEPs also provides a variety of services in addition to syringe exchange. We provide HIV prevention information and a variety of referrals including substance abuse treatment, methadone programs, and one of our most important prevention activities – HIV counseling & testing. Our staff has developed relationships with the communities impacted by substance abuse and are trusted by the people who use the SEP. People suffering from addiction can depend on the SEP to be an understanding and accepting program that will work with them and be a resource to enter treatment whenever they are ready.

The people that depend on the services of the SEP are our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, children and loved ones. They often do not have many options available to them, but the SEP is one they know they can depend on to be a resource for them to help them stay safe from infection and to be there to help them get into treatment when they are ready.

Connecticut has long been recognized as a leader in the HIV field as a state with cutting edge programs and the SEP is one of them. We were one of the first states to fund SEPs and we should keep that tradition in place. Please do not cut these programs.

Respectfully,

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